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Efforts to Ensure Food Security for Emancipating Foster Youth

California has become the first state in the nation to offer a streamlined process for providing Food Stamp benefits to youth who are “aging out” of foster care. A collaborative effort involving county social workers and eligibility staff will ensure foster youth receive assistance in applying for Food Stamps before they leave the foster care system.

Why is this important?

- Many of these youth exit their foster home or facility with little or no income or assets and without access to Food Stamp benefits for which they may be potentially eligible. These benefits will aid their transition to independence while providing food security.
- Without this effort, foster youth would be forced to find their way to a Food Stamp office in order to apply, without having received prior information about the program or any assistance in how to negotiate their way through what can be a complex process.
- While some youth may benefit from transitional housing opportunities or other available assistance programs, many are extremely vulnerable and may in fact be facing homelessness.

CDSS recent efforts:

- Working collaboratively with a county workgroup, CDSS developed a process that enhanced the likelihood that these emancipating foster youth would exit foster care with improved nutritional security through access to Food Stamp benefits.
- An All County Letter was published in June 2009 announcing this approach to serving emancipated foster youth ([ACL 09-25](#)). In the letter, youth receive assistance in filing a Food Stamp application and receive information about the program from a county worker prior to their exiting the foster care system. The application will then be automatically forwarded to the Food Stamp office for processing.

Next Steps:

- In addition to the ACL issued in June, CDSS submitted a request to the federal Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) in March 2010 for approval of a demonstration project to serve emancipating foster youth. The proposal requests additional simplifications to the program that would include a flat benefit amount, streamlined reporting responsibilities, and a shortened application form.
- If approved, the demonstration will allow foster youth to receive the maximum amount of Food Stamp benefits to which they may be eligible while removing many of the administrative complexities that might otherwise discourage them from participating in the program.
- CDSS is currently working with FNS to clarify areas of policy that must be resolved. FNS has expressed enthusiasm for the demonstration project which will result in enhanced services to this vulnerable population.